

IOWA CHILD WELFARE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

April 9, 2008

Senator Michael E. Gronstal
Senator Ron Wieck
Representative Kevin McCarthy
Representative Christopher Rants
Iowa Statehouse
State Capitol
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Jerry R. Foxhoven, Chair
George Estle, Vice-Chair

George Belitsos
Cynthia Cox
Judge Kathleen Kilnoski
Miriam Landsman
Jean McAleer
Matthew McDowell
Nancy Magnall
Richard Moore
Kathleen Penkert
Randal Peters
Ronald Stehl
David VanNingen
Tiffany Wilson

Re: Appropriations Bills for Children and Families

Dear Legislative Leaders:

Last year, you created the Iowa Child Welfare Advisory Committee which has become Iowa Code § 234.3. One of the legislative charges of that committee is "...to review departmental budgets, policies, and programs, and proposed budgets, policies, and programs, and to make recommendations and suggestions to make the state child welfare budget, programs, and policies more effective in serving families and children." As part of that charge, our committee has reviewed the various funding proposals currently under consideration that may affect children and families. This letter is intended to provide you with the recommendations and suggestions mandated by our enabling legislation.

Our committee is well aware that the State of Iowa faces funding restrictions that require you to apply funding in a way that is most reflective of the priorities of the state. We also recognize that there are many important programs that cannot be fully funded due to budgetary constraints. We have reviewed over a half dozen spending proposals (all of which are of benefit to the children and families of Iowa) where current appropriation bills provide no funding or where funding has been reduced substantially from the proposed amount. In a perfect world, all of those proposals should be fully funded. However, the committee is aware of the funding constraints with which you are faced, and we have voted to make recommendations to you on only two funding proposals which we believe are essential to our families and children.

First, several years ago, the legislature voted to begin funding of the Preparation for Adult Living Skills (PALS) program. The rationale is simple and compelling:

Phone: 515-271-2073

Fax: 515-271-4000

E-mail: jerry.foxhoven@drake.edu



children in the custody of the state who age out of the child welfare system should have both financial and emotional support like other children receive from their parents until they reach adulthood (age 21). Under the PALS program, youth who age out of the system can continue to have health insurance (Title XIX) and can continue to have the benefit of foster care, group care or independent living programs until they become adults. Few parents would “shove their child out the door” on reaching age 18, and the PALS program recognized that the State should not do so either. This program made a promise to our system youth: the State will continue to help you until you reach adulthood. The program takes three (3) years to stabilize its funding needs, because it adds 18 year olds the first year, 19 year olds the second and 20 year olds the third. The PALS program was fully funded for the first two years, but current appropriation bills do not increase the funding this year to cover the third group of newcomers to the program. If the program is not fully funded, the State will not be able to fulfill the promise it made to these youth. Waiting lists will begin and Iowa will not be able to provide the promised support to all children “aging out” of the system. Our committee strongly supports fully funding the PALS program. We hope that you will consider fulfilling the promise made to these vulnerable youth two years ago by making the PALS program a priority this legislative session.

The second recommendation from our committee involves the funding established for emergency shelters. Iowa has moved to limit the use of emergency shelters, but has recognized the need to have shelter beds available for “emergencies.” The state has, therefore, funded not only actual beds used, but also some capacity to make sure that beds will always be available when the emergency need for placement occurs. Current appropriation proposals will reduce funding for emergency shelters by \$1 million, attempting to discontinue funding for “excess capacity.” Our committee feels strongly that the State should not reduce funding for emergency shelter services for children. While it may be appropriate for the State to reduce the number of unused beds purchased from the shelter providers, the committee feels strongly that the funding is needed to continue to provide emergency child welfare services to children. The committee recommends that the legislature not reduce spending on emergency shelter services, but that any decrease in funding for “excess capacity” be used to increase emergency child welfare services to children.

Our committee has made every attempt to recognize the economic reality that the State of Iowa cannot fund all programs that are good for children and families. However, under our legislative charge, we believe it is our obligation to make recommendations and suggestions to you, the Governor and the Department of Human Services concerning what we believe are essential funding and policy priorities. We hope that you will be able to act on these two recommendations to provide a safety net for our most vulnerable citizens. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at (515) 271-2073 or by email at jerry.foxhoven@drake.edu.

Sincerely Yours,

Jerry Foxhoven,
Committee Chair